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THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AS THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR

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In days of war we ought to be contemplating the forces that will serve to make a world without war. Mere insistence upon abstract goodness is not likely to be very effective. In the organization of our best and most truly Christian instincts practical effort must be the key to the application of the gospel to the world. Here is where one meaning of missionary work is absolutely evident.

There has probably never been a time when we realized as fully as we do today the significance of William James's famous saying about our need for a "moral equivalent of war." "What we now need to discover in the social realm," he wrote in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, "is the moral equivalent of war: something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved itself to be incompatible." In these days when we are engaged in the most stupendous conflict in the history of the world it is daily being brought to our attention that in spite of all the horrors, miseries, and cruelties occasioned by war there is this one redeeming feature, that it is calling out in men capacities for heroic and sacrificial living that we never before realized they possessed. Men who before had seemed very ordinary beings, selfish, satisfied, mediocre in their ideals and enthusiasms, have been transformed by the challenge of a great cause into heroes, ready to give their all—life itself, if need be—for the sake of achieving a noble end. Coningsby Dawson observes, in his letters

written from the trenches in France, "I marvel all the time at the prosaic and even coarse types of men who have risen to the greatness of the occasion." Something of the same transforming effect may be seen also in hosts of our young women. Drop into almost any of our Red Cross headquarters, and you will see there those who six months ago had few more serious occupations than to frequent whist parties in the afternoon and the ballroom in the evening, now giving lavishly of both time and strength for the sake of ministering to human need.

Thus the war is proving to be the training-school of a more vigorous and more heroic type of life. We realize now that we were in danger of a certain moral softness creeping into our character—a subtle tendency to become too easy-going, too self-indulgent, too comfortable. Over against this the high demands of the hour, challenging us to more lofty standards of living, are developing spiritual muscle and brawn in place of the old flabbiness. The great cause to which we are now committed is making the same appeal to the heroic in men that Jesus constantly used:

"Whosoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." And we now realize more fully that the call to loyalty to a cause great enough to be worth suffering for is the strongest appeal that can come to the human heart.

The war is consequently serving also as the training-school of the spirit of service and of sacrifice. We are seeing revealed in thousands of our citizens latent capacities for unselfish devotion and vicarious living, the like of which we had almost forgotten existed. Today, as perhaps never before, men all over our land are finding in ministering to the good of mankind, rather than in acquiring selfish gain, their great objective in life. Many a youth is coming to realize that self-sacrifice means, not the effacement, but the fulfilment, of self. Again Coningsby Dawson's letters give a remarkable insight into this fact. "This time three years ago," he writes, "my streak of luck came to me and I was prancing around New York. Today I am much more genuinely happy in mind, for I feel, as I never felt before when I was only writing, that I am doing something difficult which has no element of self in it. If I come back, life will be a much less restless affair." And this discovery is being shared, not only by soldiers, but also by the rank and file of men and women at home; for, in view of what those in the training-camps and on the battle front are doing for us, no thoughtful man now feels that he has any right to lead a selfish life, or that he can find inner satisfaction thereby.

This experience of finding new reserves of power and higher ideals of action called forth by the challenge of the

present crisis is, however, one that in some measure at least has always been familiar to us. We have often felt, in our own lives, that there were days when we were far below our best level of achievement, simply because there was not, on those days, sufficient stimulus to large endeavor. We were conscious of the fact that there were within us latent resources which the greater incitement of some other day had summoned to our use. In his suggestive little book, *The Energies of Men*, William James has tersely summarized this psychological fact when he says: "Men habitually use only a small part of the powers which they actually possess, and which they might use under appropriate conditions."

But although the war does thus serve to foster a much-needed spirit of high loyalty and consecrated service, it has no monopoly of developing such an attitude. If it were so, we should almost be led to the conclusion of those philosophers that hold war to be a necessity in society in order to preserve a vigorous type of life. As a matter of common observation, any cause that is truly great enough may elicit the same lofty response. If, then, the task of the Christian church be conceived and presented in large enough terms, it ought to be within its power to call out and permanently to sustain the same capacities for heroic and unselfish living that the present crisis is now engendering in our land.

A church, like an individual or a nation, may be living upon a higher or a lower level of achievement; and in the church, as in the other two cases, what that level is will be largely determined

by the challenge presented to its powers. If the stimulus of a noble goal, such as that presented to America in the present war, can set free vast new ranges of energy, this is no less true in the life of the church. But no small cause is going to be able to do it—nothing less than the supreme task, definitely assumed, of establishing God's kingdom of righteousness and Christlike love in the whole world. Thus the modern missionary enterprise becomes for us the most remarkable "moral equivalent of war" that could possibly be conceived—"something heroic that should speak to men as universally as war does," calling them to high standards of energetic and sacrificial living, yet without carrying with it any of the awful tragedies of war. It is no new thing for us to see examples of this in the lives of the missionaries themselves. Carey in India, Judson in Burma, Paton in the New Hebrides, and hundreds of the apostles of Christ in other lands have revealed in even more unstinted measure the same spirit of heroism and of devotion that the war is now arousing in so many hearts. But we are not speaking merely of the few men upon the foreign field. We are speaking rather of the great rank and file of Christian men and women here at home, to whom the missionary enterprise could be, and ought to be, the same "moral equivalent of war" that it is to the missionary himself. The work of carrying the gospel of Christ into all the world is not assigned to a few select men—it belongs to the whole church. The missionary abroad is giving himself to a task that is every whit as much ours as his, and to which we are bound, by our loyalty to Christ,

to give just as much devotion as he. In this present war there is no exemption. The whole nation is mobilized. Those at home in various occupations are just as much a part of the force that is to win the war as are the men in the field. It is simply a question as to where and how each particular man can best render his service to the common cause. And it is not otherwise in the great campaign of the church.

In thus proposing the missionary enterprise as the great cause that can permanently keep alive the spirit of heroic and unselfish living we do not set "foreign missions" over against "home missions." There is for us but one kind of missions—Christian missions. We refuse to recognize any geographical divisions within the Kingdom of God, whether such boundaries be drawn in the interest of the special work abroad or the special work at home. We do, however, insist that we can have an adequate "moral equivalent of war" only when the church deliberately assumes responsibility for its whole task. Nothing less will afford a program challenging enough to keep us persistently at our highest level of energy and of unselfishness. The time-worn argument that we need all our resources for our work at home is really not an argument against foreign missions, but in their favor, for the thing that we need most of all, if we are to cope successfully with our tremendous problems at home, is just the spirit of devotion to a cause so great that it can release all the latent energies of the church. The greater the challenge, the more vigorous and more heroic will be the response.

How true this is, we are seeing illustrated in the effect of the present international war upon the life within the limits of the nation itself. The very fact that we have unselfishly entered into a campaign that concerns, not merely our own welfare, but that of the whole world, is stirring up new reserves of patriotism that make the United States far more competent than ever before to solve her own internal problems. Our readiness to serve the cause of all humanity has made us better servants of our own nation. Likewise would the courageous and enthusiastic acceptance by the church of its mission as world-wide stir up irresistible currents of energy such as it has not yet seen. In the words of John R. Mott: "In hitting blows hard enough to impress the Far East or Mid-Africa, we most certainly develop greater energies with which to do the task at our very doors." The great weakness in many of our churches is simply that they have not had a great enough program. They have been content with the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, and so have lost to considerable extent their vision of the significance of the weightier things of the law of love revealed by Christ for the world. Nothing else would so overcome the spiritual stagnancy resulting therefrom as to step out boldly upon the enlarged program that the modern missionary enterprise has brought.

But we are hearing voices today suggesting that it may be necessary to curtail our missionary activity in order to concentrate our effort upon the war. If we adequately understand the significance of the missionary movement, we shall realize that to abate our efforts

in that direction at this time would be very much like curtailing the fire department when a city is on fire. For the missionary enterprise is devoted all the time to achieving that which we are now, during a few months or a few years, seeking partially to accomplish by entering the war. As Christians we are in the war, not for the sake of a single foot of territory, a single dollar of indemnity, or any other selfish cause; we are in it for the sake of serving humanity, for the sake of bringing about a higher level of civilization, a better world in which to live. That is only to say that in the last analysis the ultimate issues of the war are moral and religious. It is simply to say that we are in the war because we believe that thereby we are somehow serving God—taking a step in the direction of a society that is more in accord with his will and with the spirit and principles of Jesus Christ. For, whatever may have been the origins of the war, it is rapidly becoming clearer every day that it has now developed into a conflict between forces that make for the coming of the Kingdom of God and forces that oppose it. Hence, when as Christians we give our support to the cause now presented by the war, we are simply doing, in a restricted way, a small part of what as "good soldiers of Jesus Christ" we are all the while aiming to do. Surely, then, we are not to lose the vision of the whole task at the very time when we are devoting ourselves eagerly to a particular phase of it.

Least of all in these days of international emphasis ought we to think of curtailing the missionary enterprise. This is a time when we are ashamed not to think in supra-nationalistic terms—

ashamed to take a provincial view. The war has made us patriots, not merely of the United States, or of America, but of the world. We glory in this great world-vision. But this, applied to religion, is the very heart of the missionary spirit. To give ourselves to the missionary task is to be concerned in molding, not only the life of our own nation, but also the life of the world according to the ideals of Jesus Christ. The missionary movement is the one great work that clearly rests upon the conception of the brotherhood of all men of whatever land or clime. It is, in fact, the most far-reaching international agency in the world today—the most potent way of manifesting good will and of giving of our best to all. It is the best expression of world-brotherhood that has yet been seen. To curtail it in any way would be actually to retard that very internationalism for which we are now fighting—would be to give the lie in Asia and Africa to what we are giving our lives for in Europe. Let us not, in these days above all days, relax in the slightest degree any international effort—least of all that task the full achievement of which would make war henceforth forever

impossible. For in the final analysis it is only religion that can permanently abolish war, for only it can create the new heart. The ultimate safeguards of all that we now hold worth fighting and suffering for—democracy, righteousness, the abolition of war, good will and co-operation among nations—are to be found only in the fully accepted sway of the spirit of Jesus. Not lightly has Lord Bryce recently said, “The one sure hope of a permanent foundation for world-peace lies in the expansion throughout the world of the principles of the Christian gospel.” Need is there, then, that instead of thinking of any curtailment of the missionary effort of the church we should rather plan seriously for enlargement, in preparation for the increased opportunities that will almost surely come after the war. Our missionary work is the one phase of expenditure that should know no retrenchment. Here there

. . . . has sounded forth a trumpet that
shall never call retreat;

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O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him!; be
jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on.